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ABSTRACT

A project to map the outlines of school-community initiatives for educational improvement was undertaken to provide more information about these cooperative efforts. The mapping project aimed to identify the major types, purposes, and strategies of school-community initiatives and explore the dynamics of implementing, sustaining, and expanding these initiatives. Information was drawn from a national cross-section of 20 school-community initiatives based on surveys, interviews, and group conversations. These results represent a snapshot of school-community initiatives. The report contains recommendations for establishing school-community initiatives and profiles of the 20 programs. (SLD)

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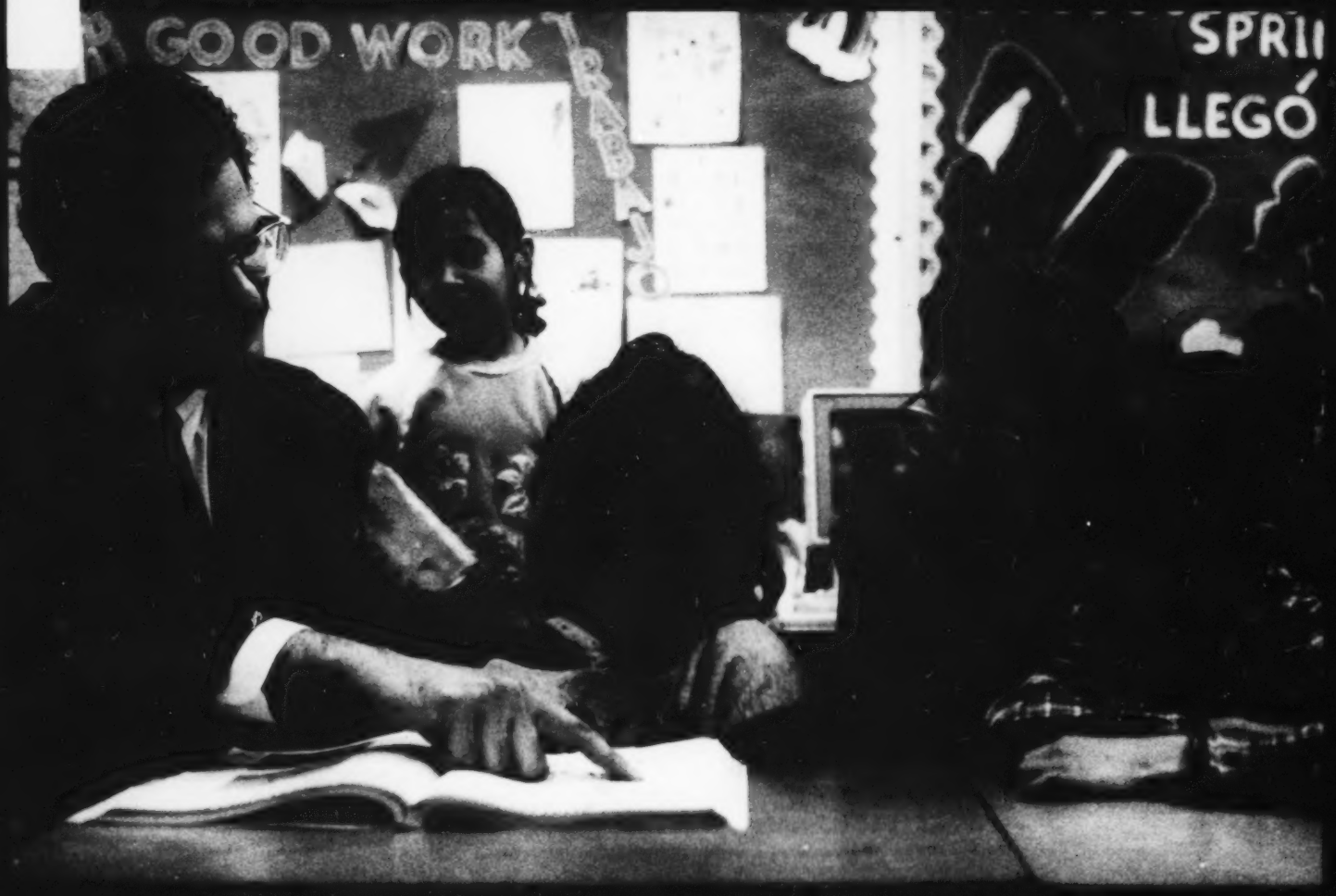
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Learning Together

A Look at 20 School-Community Initiatives

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Learning Together:

A Look at 20 School-Community Initiatives

September 1998

Atelia Melaville
AUTHOR

Martin J. Blank
PROJECT DIRECTOR

PREPARED BY
Institute for Educational Leadership
AND
National Center for Community Education

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
Center for Youth Development
and Policy Research
AND
Chapin Hall Center for Children
at University of Chicago

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CHARLES STEWART
MOTT FOUNDATION

Introduction

The "lighted schoolhouse" could be the logo of the school-community movement, symbolizing the school as the community's nerve center that provides up to 24-hour-a-day, year-round activities for residents of all ages.

Fueled by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the formal community education movement began more than 60 years ago, in Flint, Michigan. Its goal was to make schools the social, educational and recreational anchors of their communities, and to involve adults as well as young people in life-long learning. Since then, community education programs have become permanent and well-respected features of school districts across the country.

Over the past decade, a wave of new school-community initiatives has joined, and shaped, these efforts. These initiatives are transforming schools into the social, educational and recreational anchors of their communities. In steadily increasing numbers, children and youth across the country — along with their families and neighbors — are visiting schools before and after the bell rings, on weekends, and during the summer for such activities as tutoring and mentoring, recreation, primary health-care services, and job training.

This rapid growth is exciting; so, too, is its diversity. There is a great deal these initiatives can teach us about what it takes for schools and communities to work together — in partnership with young people and their families — to help youth succeed in the face of increasingly complex social and economic pressures. But not nearly enough has been done to capture these lessons and to use what has already been learned.

Encouraged by requests for more systematic information, the Institute for Educational Leadership and the National Center for Community Education, in partnership with the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research and Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago, began a two-year mapping project. The purposes were to:

- identify the major types, purposes and strategies of school-community initiatives;
- explore the dynamics of implementing, sustaining and expanding these initiatives across several key dimensions; and
- encourage networks among new and existing initiatives and recommend ways in which practitioners, policymakers and funders can strengthen and sustain the field as a whole.

Learning Together: The Developing Field of School-Community Initiatives, funded by the Mott Foundation, draws information from a national cross-section of 20 school-community initiatives based on surveys, interviews and group conversations. Some of the selected programs are large and nationally recognized, while others are smaller and lesser-known.

Because the report is not based on a random sample, the results represent a snapshot or cross-section of the school-community field, rather than a true statistical sample. Thus, conclusions and key findings apply specifically to the 20 initiatives sampled. Furthermore, the report is not an attempt to evaluate individual programs or approaches. Instead, it is an initial step toward identifying key features in the field and highlighting emerging trends.

Page numbers at the end of each paragraph or bullet throughout this Executive Summary are listed as references to information in the full report.

Early Evidence of Success

Preliminary evaluations and abundant anecdotal observation confirm that the field is full of rich and promising activity. Assessing the long-term impact of these initiatives on young people, their families and schools has been severely limited by cost and the analytic difficulty of evaluating these typically complex, multi-layered programs. Substantial research efforts are currently under way in about half of the school-community initiatives in this sample. Early evidence suggests that expanding these initiatives would be a wise investment. (*pages* 74-80)

- California's **Healthy Start** school-linked services' initiative completed the first phase of an outside evaluation in 1995. The study found that children who participated in the program in the primary grades had better attendance and improved their test scores in reading and math during a two-year period. The parents who received services in the program were three times more likely than non-participants to start working. In addition, the overall mobility rate of Healthy Start families dropped 12 percent, suggesting the program had a stabilizing influence on families. (*page* 78)
- New Jersey's **School-Based Youth Services** initiative is in the midst of a three-year evaluation. Preliminary reports for its Plainfield Teen Parenting Program are encouraging. During the two-year period studied, 84 percent of the program's mothers graduated from high school, compared with 41 percent of non-program mothers. The study also found that 11 percent of the participants had another child after entering the program compared with 33 percent of the non-participant mothers. (*page* 78)
- Children involved in the **Children's Aid Society Community Schools'** initiative have boosted their reading and math scores each year, even though more than half of them have limited English proficiency. Suspensions are down, and parental involvement is strong. Also, attendance records for teachers and students are among the highest in New York City. (*pages* 78-79)
- The **West Philadelphia Improvement Corps** initiative showed a variety of positive effects over a four-year period. Attendance and grade promotion rates improved 3 percent for students enrolled at Turner Middle School while suspensions dropped by 65 percent. During the same period, student involvement in school committees and student government tripled, and parent attendance at school functions increased by 50 percent. (*page* 79)

Key Characteristics of School-Community Initiatives

Weaving Strategies Together

- The initiatives were built around one or more of the following approaches:
  - ▸ improved educational quality and academic outcomes for youth;
  - ▸ more efficient and effective health and social service delivery for children and families;
  - ▸ increased recognition of the developmental needs of young people and the importance of building on their strengths; and
  - ▸ expanded efforts to strengthen the human, social and economic foundations of neighborhoods and communities. (*pages* 12-17)
- While most school-community initiatives are aligned more with one approach than another, most say their purposes and strategies have been influenced by all of them. Thus, the direction in the field is decidedly toward blending and integrating these initial orientations. They are working to weave strategies together without losing sight of their original purpose. (*pages* 18-19)

Getting Started

- Almost half of the initiatives studied originated in the private, nonprofit sector. Others were started by state departments of education, local school districts and non-educational government agencies at the state and local levels. (*pages* 21-23)
- Public-sector leadership of large scale, often statewide undertakings has helped move the concept of school-community initiatives into the mainstream. The nonprofit sector has introduced a steady infusion of new ideas and has increased broad-based acceptance by preventing these initiatives from being written off as just another government program. (*pages* 22-23)
- The majority of initiatives studied moved from planning to start-up within two years.
  - ▸ The most successful — those that got off the ground quickest, and have endured — were built on existing partnerships or were initiatives that faced external pressures, such as legislative deadlines. (*pages* 23-24)

Partnering with the Community

- Broad-based collaborative bodies, not school districts, oversee policy and operations at almost half of the initiatives studied.
  - ▸ The fact that so many initiatives chose a collaborative oversight structure suggests that significant involvement by a broad base of community partners is an important element of successful programs. (*pages* 27-30)
- Day-to-day management is much more school-centered. In more than half of the initiatives studied, school district staff or additional staff hired and/or supervised by school personnel are in charge of implementing and coordinating activities, supervising staff, and evaluating and expanding program efforts. (*pages* 28-29)
- At the site level, the vast majority of initiatives use cross-sector site teams to involve parents, community members, providers and school staff in local decisionmaking. Their input is most likely to be binding in two areas: 1) recommendations concerning local needs and preferred activities, and 2) their choice of selecting and/or changing local providers. (*pages* 28-29)

Staffing Programs

- All initiatives studied have a full-time coordinator at the community level responsible for the administration of all their school sites.
  - ▸ At the school site level, almost two-thirds have full-time coordinators. (*pages* 34-35)
- As principals and community-school coordinators increasingly work together, their relationships often set the tone for the programs. In the best of situations, the two work as partners. One principal said in an interview: "This school has the benefits of a two-parent household. We live in the same house, and we share our children." (*page* 36)
- A substantial number of staff members in the initiatives studied are either on loan at no cost from partner agencies or employed by an agency under contract to the initiative. (*page* 37)
- Volunteers provide a wide range of activities that the initiatives studied could not otherwise afford to offer. (*pages* 37-38)

Paying for Programs

- Most initiatives studied get funding from a variety of sources, including federal, state and local governments, and nonprofit organizations such as United Ways, universities and private foundations. (*pages* 41-43)
- Local school districts are not typically the source of core cash funding, but they are an important source of redirected services and in-kind donations. (*page* 44)
- Almost 60 percent of the initiatives studied operate with $100,000 or less in cash contributions to each site annually. A few initiatives support sites with more than $300,000 annually. (*page* 43)
- More than half of the initiatives studied collect some fees from participants. (*pages* 44-45)

Choosing Services

- Most of the initiatives studied provide more than a dozen activities, including referrals, case management, primary health care, infant and toddler programs, preschool-age child care, before- and after-school programs for pupils, mentoring, community service opportunities, recreation, leadership development, career development, employment and training, tutoring and literacy, community organizing, housing, economic development, and parent education.
  - ▸ More than 80 percent offer on-site health care services. (*pages* 50-52)
- A key feature of the initiatives studied is their program flexibility, which allows services to be more accessible and family-friendly. (*page* 53)
- Designing activities within a set of core programming areas, using a set of guiding principles or identifying specific goals for the initiative, allows for a broad range of activities while ensuring that diverse efforts are conceptually connected. (*page* 53)

Finding Sites and Hours That Work

- Activities are predominately based at school sites, but there appears to be a true blend of community and school because programs also are offered in community centers, churches housing complexes and shopping centers. (*page* 58)
- The bulk of activities offered by the initiatives studied begins when the school day ends and continues until the dinner hour.
  - ▸ The fastest growing time slot for most centers is the after-supper period, when working parents and older youth are most likely to participate.
  - ▸ The least popular time to find school-community activities is during the weekends. One way to increase services during this time slot would be to expand activities in non-school settings, especially at churches and community centers, which often have both paid and volunteer leadership. (*pages* 58-59)
- Schools are increasing their contribution to after-hours costs. However, space and staffing issues, as well as opening and closing costs, continue to pose major

barriers to continuous programming in many initiatives. (*pages* 59-60)

Serving the Community

- The focus of the initiatives studied is to provide programs for youth, but they are not the sole audience. Anyone who lives in the school's neighborhood, including family members and community residents, are invited to participate in site activities.
  - ▸ Clearly, the trend in the field is toward providing more comprehensive services for the entire community, rather than serving only a targeted population. (*pages* 65-67)
- Most of the initiatives studied serve between 300 and 700 people annually.
  - ▸ However, more than half the initiatives said their sites reach only half the potential population. (*page* 69)
- Barriers to attracting more participants, such as language and culture, could be addressed by hiring staff that mirrors the intended population. (*pages* 71-72)

Seeking Technical Assistance

- Staff at many of the initiatives studied said they need assistance in designing systems to measure results, developing long-range funding strategies and building public support. (*pages* 83-85)

Strengthening Schools

- Almost all those surveyed said their initiatives helped improve the overall climate at the schools they serve.
  - ▸ Although they don't initially attempt to do so, most sample initiatives said they successfully influence changes in non-academic school policies, such as those relating to student behavior or those having to do with the operation of the school and its relationship to the larger community. (*pages* 91-93)
- Many initiatives studied helped to strengthen their relationships with school staff, and some offered training in curriculum development for teachers.
  - ▸ Virtually all the initiatives surveyed described strengthening parental participation as part of their responsibilities, and said they have had success in this area. (*pages* 93-94)
- The initiatives set the stage for school improvement by fostering positive relationships with staff, developing parent participation and leadership, and ensuring access to the school's decisionmaking process. The first evidence of positive change is usually seen in improvements in school climate, including greater respect and communication between school personnel and families and a broader awareness of all aspects of youth well-being. (*page* 100)

Sustaining and Expanding the Initiatives

- The report underscores the importance of both sustaining and expanding school-community initiatives. (*pages* 96-99)
- The sustainability of school-community initiatives depends primarily on able leadership and long-term financing methods. Diversified funding, careful site selection, visibility and organized constituent support are also contributing factors to longevity. (*page* 101)
- In order to meet the needs of large numbers of children and families, expansion of school-community initiatives is necessary. Successful expansion, however, depends not only on increasing the number of sites but also on ensuring that the initiative's guiding principles penetrate and transform schools and their partner institutions. Reaching "scale" requires clear goals, good timing, and sufficient funding and support to maintain essential program features in both new and established sites during periods of rapid growth. (*page* 101)

Report Recommendations

- Intensified involvement of the private sector in the creation, oversight and management of school-community initiatives to ensure the field's diversity, innovation and broad-based acceptability.

- Expanded public-sector leadership at all levels of government to provide incentives and support for increasing numbers of local efforts to cover start-up costs, provide sustained core support and expand school-community initiatives at levels needed to reach large numbers of children.

- Expanded development of community-based collaborative bodies to provide oversight to school-community initiatives, ensure complementariness among separate, but related, reform efforts, strengthen public understanding of school-community initiatives, and formulate sustainable financing strategies.

- Organizing site selection and expansion plans around school clusters that include elementary, middle and secondary schools to ensure services, supports and opportunities appropriate to all age groups, including older adolescents.

- More activities during underserved times by increasing the location of activities at community-based locations, especially during weekends.

- Substantial and long-term technical assistance from all levels of government and the philanthropic community, focused especially on helping initiatives and sites work with key state and local partners to develop the key elements of a results-based accountability system. This includes selecting results, developing methods for tracking indicators, and measuring the financial impact of their efforts through both costs avoided and benefits accrued.

- A comprehensive range of training and technical assistance to help initiatives develop purposeful and coherent ways of integrating purposes, strategies and activities across services and major approaches, including services and school reform, and youth and community development.

- Increased communication, peer-to-peer technical assistance and networking among initiatives and sites to increase the rate at which communities can learn from and assist each other. *(pages 101-102)*

Initiative Descriptions

Alliance Schools Initiatives, *State of Texas*

The Texas Interfaith Education Alliance initiative started in 1992 and now includes 89 schools throughout southwestern Texas. Alliance's school-community teams have developed neighborhood efforts to counter gang violence and ease racial tensions, introduced tutorial and scholarship opportunities, developed after-school and extended-day programs, and made substantive changes in curriculum, scheduling and assessment methods. (*page* 25)

Ernesto Cortez
Texas Interfaith Education Fund
1106 Clayton Lane, Suite 120W
Austin, TX 78723
512-459-6551
512-459-6558 (fax)

Beacon Schools, *New York City*

Beacons are school-based community centers located throughout all five boroughs of New York City. Beacons give young people a chance to participate in drama groups, develop leadership skills, take music lessons, sing in choruses and perform community service. Family support and health services, employment preparation, and other services reach 70,000 students annually. (*page* 25)

Michele Cahill
Beacons Schools
Fund for the City of New York
121 Avenue of the Americas
New York, NY 10013
212-925-6675
212-925-5675 (fax)

Birmingham Community Education
Birmingham, Alabama

Supported by regular allocations from the City Council and the Birmingham School District Board of Education, the program utilizes a network of more than 450 volunteers, making it the largest community education program in the state. The program offers classes and activities for every age group and provides services to address issues such as illiteracy, unemployment, substance abuse, teen pregnancy and homelessness. (*page* 32)

Peggy Sparks
Parent, Community and Student Support Program
Davis Center
417 29th Street S.
Birmingham, AL 35233
205-581-5003
205-581-5084 (fax)

Bridges To Success, *Indianapolis, Indiana*

Bridges' oversight is provided by the BTS Council, a community collaborative, but its day-to-day management is provided by a partnership between the United Way of Central Indiana and Indianapolis Public Schools. BTS — in the midst of a major expansion into 28 schools with an enrollment of about 20,00 students — connects students and families with a wide range of services and youth development activities. (*page* 32)

Nedra Feeley
Bridges To Success
United Way of Central Indiana/
Community Service Council/
Indianapolis Public Schools
3901 N. Meridian St.
P.O. Box 88409
Indianapolis, IN 46208-0409
317-921-1283
317-921-1355 (fax)

Caring Communities, *State of Missouri*

There are 64 Caring Communities throughout the state, which are overseen by local community partnerships authorized by the state to organize and finance a variety of services to families and children. In 1995, the General Assembly appropriated $21.6 million to be pooled among five state agencies to support comprehensive, school-linked service delivery. (*page* 39)

Jermal Seward
St. Louis Caring Community Program
4411 N. Newstead Ave.
St. Louis, MO 63115
314-877-2050
314-877-2057 (fax)

Children's Aid Society Community Schools *New York City*

CAS — a partnership between the New York City Board of Education, the school district and community organizations — aims to develop a model of public schools that combines teaching and learning with the delivery of a variety of social, health and youth services emphasizing community and parental involvement. The program serves predominantly new immigrants with low income — more than 7,000 students and their families — from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. year-round. (*page* 39)

Pete Moses
Children's Aid Society
105 E. 22nd St.
New York, NY 10010
212-949-4921
212-460-5941 (fax)

Communities In Schools *Alexandria, Virginia*

A national organization of more than 135 local initiatives in 33 states and Washington, D.C., CIS provides information, training, technical support and linkages. The initiatives are governed by independent, public-private partnerships that share a mission to bring a variety of health, social and family services into schools for students and their families. They also attempt to connect young people with caring adults, reduce the dropout rate, and develop youths' skills. (*page* 48)

Janet Longmore
Communities In Schools
1199 N. Fairfax St., #300
Alexandria, VA 22314-1436
703-519-8999
703-519-7213 (fax)

Community Education Centers
St. Louis, Missouri

Sixteen community centers offer free and fee-for-service activities to 18,000 residents annually. Activities include parenting and family services, summer academies focused on cultural awareness, neighborhood involvement in problem-solving, and a variety of recreation and community education classes. (*page* 48)

John Windom
St. Louis Community Education Centers
St. Louis Public Schools
1517 S. Theresa
St. Louis, MO 63104
314-773-7962
314-773-1372 (fax)

Community Education Program
St. Louis Park, Minnesota

Administered by the school district, the program derives substantial support and guidance from a large, citywide volunteer advisory council comprised of representatives, including youth, from the public and private sector. Resident participation in the design and direction of its programs is a hallmark of the St. Louis Park program, which operates 10 community education centers throughout the city, all located in either schools or community centers. (*page* 56)

Bridget Gothberg
Community Education Director
St. Louis Park Public Schools
St. Louis Park, MN 55426
612-928-6063
612-928-6020 (fax)

CoZi Project, Yale University Bush Center *New Haven, Connecticut*

CoZi links two existing initiatives: 1) School Development Program (SDP), which engages parents and school staff in collaborative, decisionmaking teams, and 2) Schools of the 21st Century, a school-based service that provides outreach to families, especially those with children from birth to age 3. *(page 56)*

Matia Finn-Stevenson
CoZi Project
Bush Center in Child Development and Social Policy
310 Prospect St.
New Haven, CT 06511-2188
203-432-9944
203-432-9945 (fax)

Family Resource and Youth Services Centers *State of Kentucky*

Nearly 600 schools statewide are funded to help implement Family Resource Centers and Youth Services Centers. The Family Centers, located in elementary schools, provide preschool and school-age child care, education for new parents, referral services, and training for day-care providers. The Youth Centers, located in middle and high schools, focus on the needs of young people by offering several services, including employment counseling, training and placement, substance abuse and mental health counseling, and service referrals. *(page 63)*

Robert Goodlett/Terry Conliffe
Family Resources and Youth Services Center
275 E. Main St., G-26
Frankfort, KY 40621-0001
502-564-4986
502-564-6108 (fax)

Family Resource Schools *Denver, Colorado*

The program is a partnership among parents, schools, the Board of Education, private industry, foundations and human service providers. The 14 Family Resource Schools provide activities in four core areas: adult education and skill building, parent education, student growth and achievement, and staff development. Centers offer activities from morning to night year-round. *(page 63)*

Ginger Harrell
Family Resource Schools
1330 Fox Street
Denver, CO 80204
303-405-8190

Full Service Schools *Jacksonville, Florida*

This program, housed in five neighborhood high schools, uses site teams from city and county public agencies to provide counseling and support services for children and families experiencing domestic, behavioral and economic problems. Each Full Service School is governed by a cross-sector site team composed of teachers, parents, students, principals and residents. *(page 68)*

Linda Tuday
United Way of Northeast Florida
1300 Riverplace Blvd., Suite 500
P.O. Box 41428
Jacksonville, FL 32203-1428
904-390-3207
904-390-3251 (fax)

Healthy Start *State of California*

The intent of Healthy Start, one of the nation's largest school-linked initiatives, is to remove barriers to students' academic success by improving access to a wide range of support services for students and families who meet eligibility requirements. An average site offers services to meet many needs in many areas, including education, food, clothing and shelter, child care, parenting, health care, employment counseling and training, and recreation. *(page 68)*

Lisa Villarreal
Healthy Start
EDUC-CRESS Center
UC Davis
Davis, CA 95616
530-752-1277
530-752-3754 (fax)
lrvillarreal@ucdavis.edu

New Beginnings, *San Diego, California*

New Beginnings provides a wide array of services including health care, literacy and translation support, parent education, and referral services for targeted poor children and families. The program has played a key role in a regional data sharing project, which has helped improve delivering services for children and families. (*page* 73)

Connie Roberts
Community Initiatives for Children and Families
Health and Human Services Agency
1700 Pacific Highway, Room 106
San Diego, CA 92101
619-515-6543
619-515-6758 (fax)

New Visions for Public Schools
New York City

New Visions is a privately subsidized effort to create small, nurturing, academically strong schools throughout the New York City school system. Forty-one of an anticipated 50 schools are in operation. All New Visions schools are different because each is organized around a distinctive and unifying theme, such as health. What they have in common, though, is their close connection to the community, and the high expectations they have for their students. (*page* 73)

Gerry Vazquez
New Visions for Public Schools
96 Morton St
New York, NY 10014
212-645-5110
212-645-7409 (fax)

School-Based Youth Services Program
State of New Jersey

The program reaches 15,000 youth annually at 48 sites that are located primarily in high schools, but are also in elementary and middle schools, with at least one center in every county in the state. Its goal "is to provide adolescents and children, especially those with problems, with the opportunity to complete their education, obtain skills that lead to employment or additional education, and to lead a mentally and physically healthy life." Every site provides crisis intervention, health and employment services, and recreational activities. (*page* 81)

Roberta Knowlton
New Jersey School-Based Youth Services Program - Capital Place One
222 S. Warren St.
P.O. Box 700
Trenton, NJ 08625
609-292-7816
609-984-7380 (fax)

Readiness-to-Learn Initiative
State of Washington

This program is a collaborative effort of five state agencies intent on integrating family services — the departments of education, social services, health, labor and economic development. Local collaboratives provide a variety of activities for children and families. Over 31 consortia have linked with public and private sector agencies — including colleges, universities and businesses — to reach 7,500 people annually. (*page* 81)

Christine McElroy
Department of Public Instruction
Washington State Readiness-to-Learn Initiative
Old Capital Building - P.O. Box 47200
Olympia, WA 98504-7200
360-753-6760
360-664-3575 (fax)

Vaughn Family Center/Pacoima Urban Village, *San Fernando, California*

The center, located in a charter school setting, was designed as a model for restructuring the way health and human services are delivered for children and their families. The center provides family support, health services, leadership development, job training and employment services. While maintaining its school-based center, the Vaughn initiative has extended its work into a nearby housing project. (*page* 86)

Matt Oppenheim/Jorge Lara
Pacoima Urban Village
12700 Van Nuys Blvd.
Pacoima, CA 91331
818-834-9557
818-834-9464 (fax)

West Philadelphia Improvement Corps
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

WEPIC, with the partnership of the University of Pennsylvania, has evolved from a youth corps into a school-community program that provides education, recreation, social and health services for students and neighborhood residents. Thirteen elementary, middle and high schools serve as sites for activities during and after school that focus on areas such as health, environment, conflict resolution, peer mediation and extended-day apprenticeships in the construction trades. (*page* 86)

Joann Weeks
West Philadelphia Improvement Corps
133 S. 36th St., Suite 519
Philadelphia, PA 19104-3246
215-898-0240
215-573-2799 (fax)

Partners in Project

Martin J. Blank
Institute for Educational Leadership
1001 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
202-822-8405
202-872-4050 (fax)
blankm@iel.org

Dan Cady and Pat Edwards
National Center for Community Education
1017 Avon Street
Flint, MI 48503
810-238-0463
810-238-9211 (fax)
www.nccenet.org

Richard Murphy
Center for Youth Development
Academy for Educational Development
1875 Connecticut Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20009-1202
202-884-8266
202-884-8404 (fax)
rmurphy@aed.org
www.aed.org

Joan Wynn
Chapin Hall Center for Children
University of Chicago
1313 E. 60th Street, 4th Floor
Chicago, IL 60637
773-753-5900
773-753-5940 (fax)

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